

# Annual Report 2015 Fiscal Year

July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015



## Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Chair  
Dr. John B. Susa

Commissioners  
Iraida Williams  
Camille Vella-Wilkinson  
Alberto Aponte Cardona, Esq.  
Rochelle Bates Lee  
Angelyne E. Cooper, Esq.  
Tolulope Kevin Olasanoye, Esq.

Executive Director  
Michael D. Évora, Esq.

January 29, 2016

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo  
Office of the Governor  
State House, Room 222  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Raimondo:

It is with sincere pleasure that I submit to you the latest Annual Report of the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (Commission).

The Report conveys essential information on the program activities of the Commission during the 2015 fiscal year, including charge intake, charge investigation, administrative hearings and final case dispositions. In addition, the Report offers a summary of agency Decisions and Orders, an update on education/outreach efforts, a summary of enforcement/court actions undertaken by the Commission, and highlights of caseload accomplishments occurring during what has been an eventful year.

Through the diligent efforts of Commissioners and Commission staff, and with the assistance of student interns, the agency realized significant achievements during FY 2015. For the seventeenth consecutive year, the number of cases processed by the Commission exceeded the number of new cases taken in, thereby decreasing the number of open cases carried forward into a new fiscal year. In addition, the Commission achieved a milestone in respect to case processing: the average age of a case at final disposition was a record low 300 days.

Consistent with the agency's statutory mandate to implement a comprehensive educational program, Commission staff members conducted 45 education/outreach sessions in the community, reaching over 1,100 employers, housing providers and individuals and educating them about their rights and responsibilities under state and federal antidiscrimination laws.

I hope that you find the Report informative and helpful as you (and the General Assembly) contemplate the resources to be devoted to this vital agency in the future.

Sincerely,

John B. Susa, Ph.D.  
Chairperson

*"The practice or policy of discrimination against individuals ... is a matter of state concern. Such discrimination foments domestic strife and unrest, threatens the rights and privileges of the inhabitants of the state, and undermines the foundations of a free democratic state. The denial of equal employment opportunities because of such discrimination and the consequent failure to utilize the productive capacities of individuals to their fullest extent deprive large segments of the population of the state of earnings necessary to maintain decent standards of living, necessitates their resort to public relief, and intensifies group conflicts, thereby resulting in grave injury to the public safety, health, and welfare.*

*It is hereby declared to be the public policy of this state to foster the employment of all individuals in this state in accordance with their fullest capacities ... and to safeguard their right to obtain and hold employment without such discrimination.*

*The right of all individuals in this state to equal employment opportunities ... is hereby recognized as, and declared to be a civil right."*

From R.I. Public Laws 1949, ch. 2181, by which  
the Commission for Human Rights was created and empowered

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# **Commissioners and Staff Members**

## **Commissioners**

John B. Susa, Ph.D., Chair  
Alberto Aponte Cardona, Esq.  
Angelyne E. Cooper, Esq.  
Rochelle Bates Lee  
Tolulope Kevin Olasanoye, Esq.  
Camille Vella-Wilkinson  
Iraida Diaz Williams

## **Staff**

Michael D. Évora, Esq., Executive Director

Cynthia M. Hiatt, Esq., Legal Counsel  
Francis A. Gaschen, Esq., Legal Counsel

Angie V. Lovegrove, HUD Project Director

Marlene Colón Toribio, EEOC Project Director

Glenn C. Cardozo, Sr. Compliance Officer  
Tina M. Christy, Sr. Compliance Officer  
Allison G. Côté, Sr. Compliance Officer  
VACANT, Sr. Compliance Officer\*

Stephen W. Strycharz, Investigator  
Jason Flanders, Investigator  
Dina I. Quezada, Investigator

Betsy A. Ross, Chief Clerk  
Lynn Soccio, Administrative Aide  
Zaida Rivera, Administrative Aide

\*This position was vacated in August 2009 and the Commission has not received authorization to fill it.

## **FY 2015 HIGHLIGHTS**

### **INTAKE**

The Commission took in 394 new charges of discrimination, representing a six percent increase over FY 2014. Of the new charges, 70.3% were in the area of employment, 25.6% in housing and 1.8% in public accommodations. Charges of disability discrimination in delivery of services (unrelated to employment, housing or public accommodations) accounted for 2.3% of intake.

Claims of disability discrimination predominated, with 177 new cases, or 44.9% of cases taken in, containing an allegation of disability discrimination. Claims of age and sex discrimination followed, with 108 new cases, or 27.4%, containing age-based allegations, and 108 cases containing sex-based allegations (including pregnancy discrimination and sexual harassment). Claims of retaliation and race discrimination followed, with 88 and 78 claims respectively, representing 22.3% and 19.8%.

### **INVESTIGATIONS**

For the seventeenth consecutive year, the Commission processed more cases than it took in (425 vs. 394).

- Probable Cause was found in approximately 12.5% of total cases processed, representing an increase from FY 2014 (7.7%);
- No Probable Cause was found in approximately 33.2% of total cases processed, representing a decrease from FY 2014 (39.4%); a substantial number of these cases resulted from a complainant's failure to pursue his/her charge;
- Approximately 22.8% of cases settled prior to a determination of Probable Cause or No Probable Cause, representing an increase from FY 2014 (17.3%).

### **ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS**

The Commission held administrative hearings in three cases. A Decision and Order was issued in one case, finding that an Hispanic teacher was subjected to discriminatory terms and conditions of employment by a local school department and school official because of her ancestral origin/accent. The Commission also issued a decision granting a local university's request that the Commission certify that the female sex was a bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) for one position of storekeeper in the equipment/locker room at the university's athletic facility.

### **THE COMMISSION AT THE COURTS**

Among its court activities throughout the year, the Commission: submitted an amicus brief to the state Supreme Court in support of the position that the state Fair Employment Practices Act allows for charges to be filed against individual employees; successfully pursued a case of housing discrimination based on familial status, resulting in summary judgment for the Commission and complainants; filed an Adversary Complaint in bankruptcy court contesting the dischargeability of a respondent debt incurred as the result of damages awarded pursuant to a Commission Decision and Order.

### **CASELOAD ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- The Commission processed nearly 13% more cases in FY 2015 than in FY 2014 (425 vs. 376).
- The Commission has realized a steady and significant decrease in the time taken to process cases. While the average age of a case at closure in FY 2003 was over three years, the average age of cases closed in FY 2015 was a record low 300 days.
- Of the total cases processed during FY 2015, 23.5% were the result of settlements, representing a significant increase from FY 2014 (19%).

### **OUTREACH**

Commission staff members conducted 45 outreach/education sessions in the community, reaching nearly 1,100 employers, housing providers and individuals and educating them about their rights and responsibilities pursuant to state and federal antidiscrimination laws.

## Agency Overview

The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (Commission) was created by the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1949 and is one of the oldest state anti-discrimination agencies in the country. In establishing the Commission, the General Assembly declared that "[t]he practice or policy of discrimination against individuals ... is a matter of state concern", and observed that "... discrimination foments domestic strife and unrest, threatens the rights and privileges of the inhabitants of the state, and undermines the foundations of a free democratic state". R.I.G.L. § 28-5-2. Through impartial investigation, formal and informal resolution efforts, predetermination conferences and administrative hearings, the Commission seeks to ensure due process for both complainants (charging parties) and respondents (those against whom charges are filed), to provide redress for victims of discrimination, and to properly dismiss cases in those instances in which charges of discrimination lack evidentiary support.

The Commission enforces Rhode Island anti-discrimination laws in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. The employment and public accommodations statutes prohibit discrimination based on race, color, sex, disability, ancestral origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and age. The housing statute, in addition to prohibiting discrimination on these bases, also prohibits discrimination based on marital status, familial status, status as a victim of domestic abuse, housing status, military status and association with members of a protected class. The credit statute, in addition to prohibiting discrimination on the bases covered by the employment law, also prohibits discrimination based on marital status, familial status and military status. Discrimination in

the delivery of services on the basis of disability is prohibited.

The Commission's major program activities include intake, investigation, conciliation, administrative hearings, enforcement, outreach and education.

The Commission was created and empowered by Title 28, Chapter 5 of the General Laws of Rhode Island (the Fair Employment Practices Act) and has statutory responsibility to enforce the following laws:

- Fair Employment Practices Act (R.I.G.L. § 28-5-1, *et seq.*)
- Fair Housing Practices Act (R.I.G.L. § 34-37-1, *et seq.*)
- Hotels and Public Places Act (R.I.G.L. § 11-24-1, *et seq.*)
- Prevention and Suppression of Contagious Diseases—HIV/AIDS Act (R.I.G.L. §§ 23-6.3-11 and 23-6.3-12)
- Civil Rights of People with Disabilities Act (R.I.G.L. § 42-87-1, *et seq.*)
- Equal Rights of Blind and Deaf Persons to Public Facilities Act (R.I.G.L. § 40-9.1-1, *et seq.*)

The Commission is overseen by seven Commissioners who are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Commissioners are not compensated for the services they render to the agency.

In addition to enforcing state laws, the Commission has contractual agreements with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist in the enforcement of the following federal laws: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

## PROTECTED CATEGORIES UNDER STATE AND FEDERAL LAW

	Employment		Housing		Public Accommodations	Credit
	State	Federal	State	Federal	State	State
Race	√	√	√	√	√	√
Color	√	√	√	√	√	√
Religion	√	√	√	√	√	√
Ancestral Origin	√	√	√	√	√	√
Sex[1]	√	√	√	√	√	√
Disability[2]	√	√	√	√	√	√
Age[3]	√	√	√		√	√
Sexual Orientation[4]	√	*	√	*	√	√
Gender Identity or Expression[5]	√	√	√	*	√	√
Familial Status			√	√		√
Marital Status			√	*		√
Status as a Victim of Domestic Abuse			√	*		
Housing Status[6]			√			
Conviction Status[7] ("Ban the Box")	√					
Military Status[8]			√			√
Retaliation	√	√	√	√	√	√

1 Includes sexual harassment and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy status.

2 Includes physical and mental disabilities.

3 Protects individuals 40+ years of age in Employment; protects individuals 18+ years of age in Housing, Public Accommodations and Credit.

4 Protects individuals who are heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual.

5 Includes an individual's actual or perceived gender, as well as an individual's gender identity, gender-related self-image, gender-related appearance, or gender-related expression, whether or not that gender identity, gender-related self-image, appearance or expression is different from that traditionally associated with that individual's sex at birth.

6 "Housing Status" means the status of having or not having a fixed or regular residence, including the status of living on the streets or in a homeless shelter or similar temporary residence.

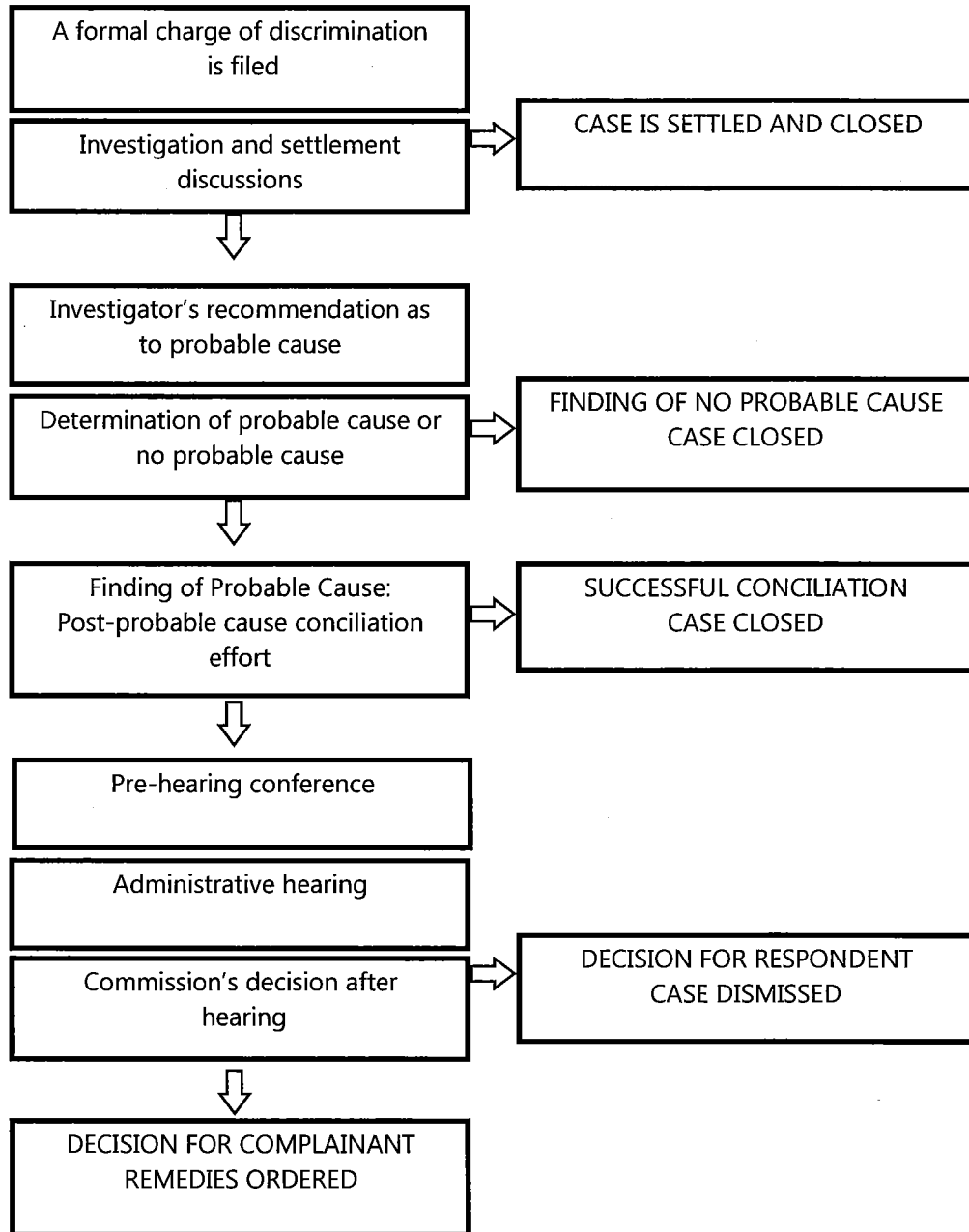
7 Prohibits employers from inquiring before a first interview, either via an employment application or otherwise, whether an applicant has been convicted of a crime. Certain exceptions apply.

8 "Military Status" means status as a service member in the Armed Forces, or status as a veteran with an honorable discharge or an honorable or general administrative discharge.

\* Federal law prohibits discrimination on this basis in certain instances.



# CHARGE PROCESS SUMMARY



NOTE: Rhode Island law expressly provides that, under certain circumstances, complainants and/or respondents may elect to terminate proceedings before the Commission and have the case heard in Superior Court.

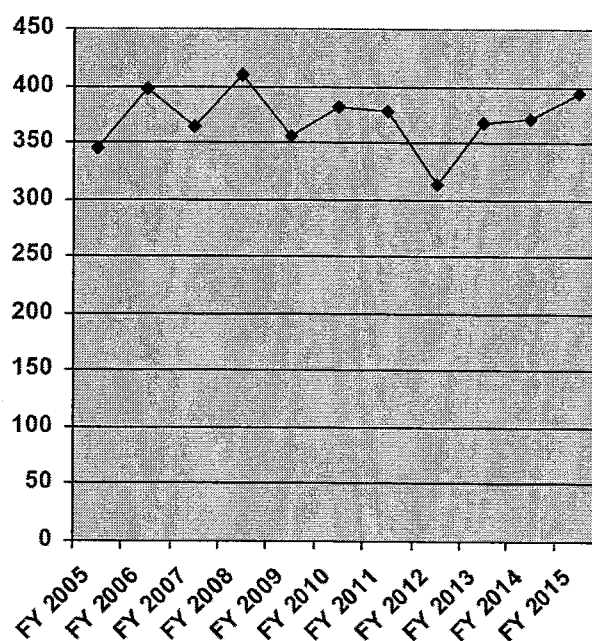
## Intake

*Inquiries are received and evaluated. If jurisdictional requirements are met, a formal charge of discrimination is filed and forwarded to the respondent.*

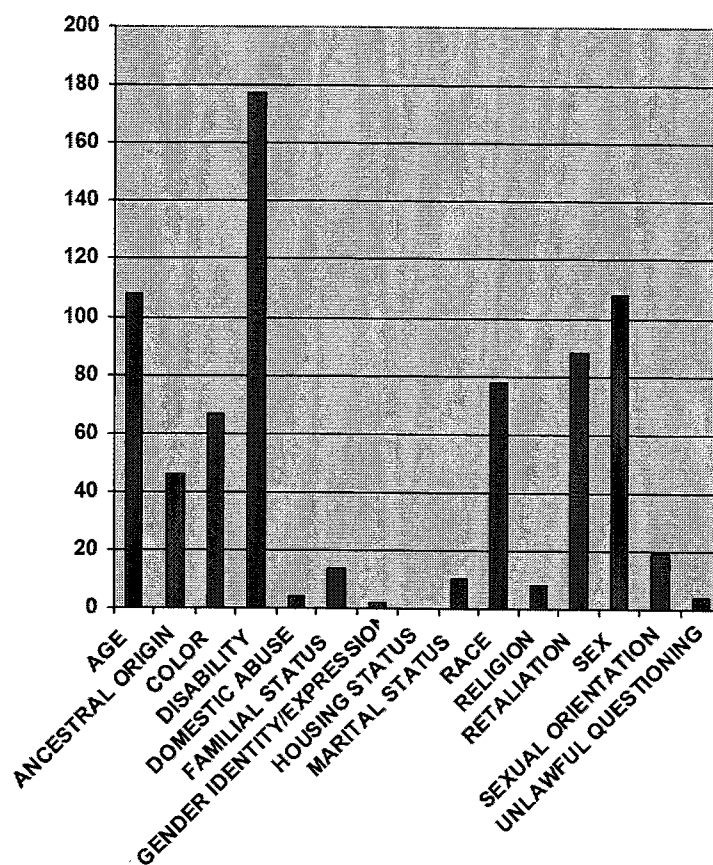
The intake process usually begins with a telephone call or visit to the Commission. Each year the agency receives thousands of telephone and walk-in inquiries from individuals requesting information or wanting to pursue a charge of discrimination. The majority of these inquiries do not come within the jurisdiction of the Commission and these are referred to other agencies or organizations. In those cases in which the inquiry presents a claim within the Commission's jurisdiction, an intake officer assists the individual in filing a formal charge of discrimination.

The Commission took in a total of 394 cases in the fiscal year, representing a six percent increase from FY 2014 (371). As in past years, disability claims predominated in this year's intake, with a total of 177 new cases, or 44.9% of total cases, containing an allegation of disability discrimination. Age and sex-based claims followed in number, with a total of 108 cases, or 27.4%, containing an allegation of age discrimination, and 108 cases containing an allegation of sex discrimination (including pregnancy and sexual harassment claims). Retaliation claims and race-based claims followed at 88 and 78 (22.3% and 19.8%), respectively.

INTAKE BY FISCAL YEAR



FY 15 INTAKE BY BASIS



## FY 2015 INTAKE BY AREA

	Number	Percent of Total
Employment	277	70.3
Housing	101	25.6
Public Accommodations	7	1.8
Delivery of Services*	9	2.3
Credit	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>100</b>

## FY 2015 INTAKE BY BASIS AND AREA\*\*

	Employment	Housing	Public Accom.	Indiv. with Disab.*	Credit	Totals
Age	80	28	0	NA	0	108
Ancestral Origin	37	8	1	NA	0	46
Color	52	12	3	NA	0	67
Disability	116	48	4	9	0	177
Familial Status	NA	14	NA	NA	0	14
Gender Identity or Expression	1	0	1	NA	0	2
Housing Status	NA	0	NA	NA	NA	0
Marital Status	NA	10	NA	NA	0	10
Race	64	12	2	NA	0	78
Religion	8	0	0	NA	0	8
Retaliation	85	1	2	0	0	88
Sex***	94	12	2	NA	0	108
Sexual Orientation	12	7	0	NA	0	19
Status as Victim of Domestic Abuse	NA	4	NA	NA	NA	4
Unlawful Questioning	4	NA	NA	NA	NA	4

\*Figures reflect charges of disability discrimination in delivery of services (unrelated to employment, housing, public accommodations or credit).

\*\*Figures reflect the fact that most charges filed allege more than one basis of discrimination. Example: if a given charge alleged discrimination on the bases of age, race and color, it is reflected in the figures for all three categories.

\*\*\*Includes allegations of pregnancy discrimination and sexual harassment.

## Investigations

*Upon assignment, an investigator conducts an impartial investigation of the allegations and, after analyzing all elements of the case, makes a recommendation to a Preliminary Investigating Commissioner.*

After the intake phase is completed and a formal charge of discrimination is filed, each case is assigned to an investigator. The average time from the filing of a charge to assignment to an investigator was six weeks or less. Most of the Commission's personnel resources are devoted to the investigation process. **Approximately 23.5% of case closures in FY 2015 resulted from settlements or conciliations, representing an increase from FY 2014 (19%).**

For those cases which do not settle, investigators use a variety of techniques to investigate the case. Often the investigators hold Predetermination Conferences where both complainants and respondents can present evidence to support or refute the allegations. The conferences are held before a Preliminary Investigating Commissioner. A case may involve the collection and analysis of comparative, statistical and/or direct evidence. Investigators may need to travel on-site to collect information and testimony pertinent to the charge. Not all investigations are alike. The individual characteristics of each case will influence an investigator's approach. **In furtherance of the investigative process, the**

**Commission issued multiple subpoenas in the fiscal year to compel the production of documents and witness testimony.**

**In FY 2015, a determination of "Probable Cause" was rendered in approximately 12.5% of total processed cases, reflecting an increase from FY 2014 (7.7%)** While the percentage of Probable Cause cases may seem low, it should be noted that many potential Probable Cause cases settle prior to a formal determination as to Cause and some cases in which the complainant requests a right to sue may be Probable Cause cases. **During the fiscal year, the Commission settled 97 cases (22.8% of total cases processed) prior to a determination as to whether Probable Cause existed.**

**A "No Probable Cause" determination was rendered in approximately 33.2% of total processed cases, reflecting a decrease from FY 2014 (39.4%).** A significant number of these No Cause findings resulted from a complainant's failure to pursue her/his charge by failing to respond to requests for information.

**For the seventeenth consecutive year, the Commission processed more cases than it took in (425 vs. 394), resulting in a continued decrease in the number of cases carried forward to the next fiscal year.** "Processed" cases include cases in which a determination of Probable Cause is rendered. Although such cases are not yet closed, they are included in the list of case dispositions to provide an accurate view of the Commission's work.

# Case Dispositions

## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

<b>Administrative Closures</b>	Includes cases closed for failure to locate a complainant, complainant's failure to cooperate, no jurisdiction, charges withdrawn without benefits, receiverships, and bankruptcies.
<b>Conciliation</b>	Case settled after a finding of probable cause.
<b>Decision and Order</b>	Commission makes a finding after a hearing before the agency. If the decision is for the complainant, remedies are ordered. If it is for the respondent, the case is dismissed.
<b>Negotiated Settlement</b>	Case formally settled prior to a finding of Probable Cause or No Probable Cause.
<b>No Probable Cause</b>	Insufficient evidence exists to support the probability that the complainant was a victim of discrimination.
<b>Probable Cause</b>	Sufficient evidence exists to support the probability that the complainant was a victim of discrimination.
<b>Right to Sue</b>	Complainant is issued a Notice enabling her/him to take the case to court, and the Commission closes the case internally.
<b>Withdrawal with Benefits</b>	Complainant withdraws the case upon receiving a settlement from the respondent.

## Status of Probable Cause Cases FY 2015

<b>Probable Cause cases</b>	<b>53</b>
Respondent's Election to Superior Court for Trial	16
Complainant's Election to Superior Court for Trial	1
Joint Election	1
Conciliation	0
Open as of 6/30/15 [pending conciliation, administrative hearing or other closure at the Commission]	35

## Case Dispositions FY 2015

Type of Disposition	Number
<b>Decision and Order</b>	1
<b>Probable Cause</b>	53
<b>No Probable Cause</b>	141
<b>Conciliation*</b>	3
<b>Negotiated Settlement</b>	34
<b>Withdrawal with Settlement</b>	63
<b>Right to Sue</b>	97
<b>Administrative Closure</b>	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>425</b>

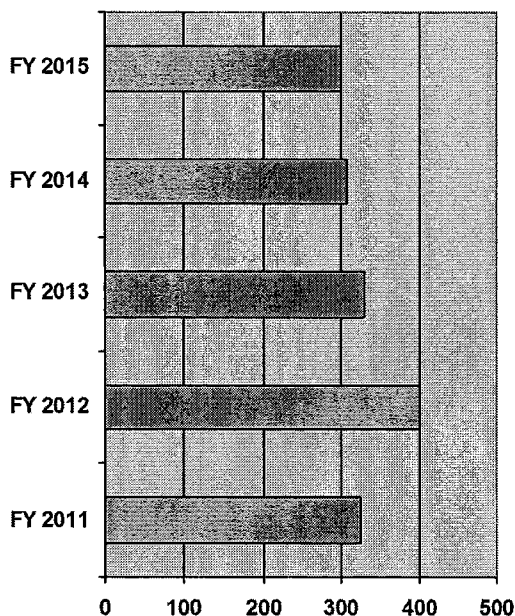
\*Includes conciliation of cases in which probable cause was found in a prior fiscal year.

## Caseload Statistics

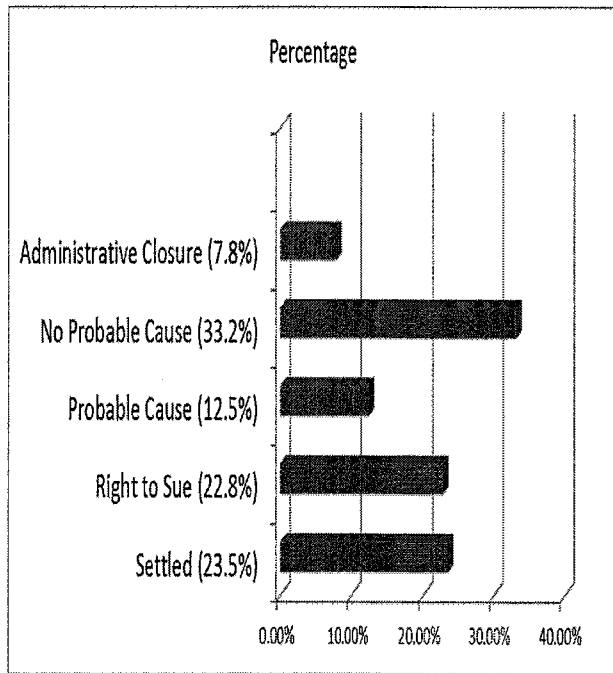
### CASE PROCESSING TIME

In recent years, the Commission has labored to ensure more expeditious processing of cases. The “hands on” approach in caseload management taken by Director Évora, concerted staff efforts and the use of the Commission’s subpoena power to expedite stalled investigations are among the tools used to achieve success in this area. The average age of cases closed in FY 2003 exceeded three years. By FY 2006, that time had been decreased to 423 days. For FY 2015, the average age of a case at closure was a record low 300 days.

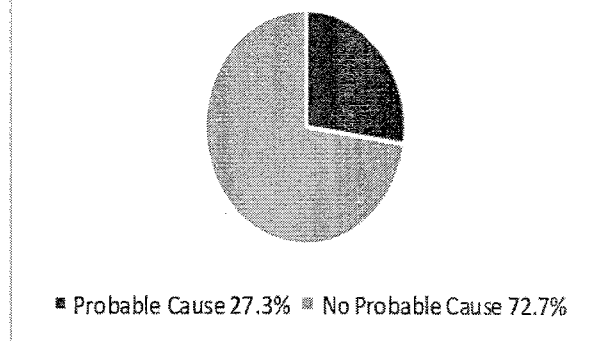
### AVERAGE CASE AGE (DAYS) AT CLOSURE BY FISCAL YEAR



### DISPOSITION OF CASES DURING INVESTIGATION



### INVESTIGATIVE RULINGS (Probable Cause vs. No Probable Cause)



## Administrative Hearings

*After a “probable cause” ruling, a Commissioner conducts an administrative hearing during which sworn testimony is taken before a stenographer. A Decision and Order is rendered thereafter.*

The administrative hearing process begins after the Preliminary Investigating Commissioner finds probable cause and the parties are unable to conciliate. (The parties have the statutory right, after a finding of probable cause, to elect to have the matter heard and decided in the Superior Court; in cases in which no such election is made, the agency’s administrative hearing process commences.) One Commissioner conducts the hearing with the assistance of Legal Counsel. At the hearing, which is less formal than a court trial, witnesses present sworn testimony and relevant exhibits are accepted. A stenographer makes a record of the entire proceeding. After the parties present all their evidence, three Commissioners decide the case and issue an order.

A typical hearing lasts from one to three days. For all parties involved, including the Commission, the administrative hearing can be a costly and time-consuming activity. Despite receiving no reimbursement for services rendered, Commissioners routinely held hearings.

## Commission Hearings and Closures FY 2015

Cases in which Hearings were Held	3
Number of Hearing Days	2
<b>Closures of Cases in Hearings</b>	
Total Decision and Orders	1
Decision for Complainant	0
Decision for Respondent	0
Mixed Ruling	1
Written decisions on motions (These include motions to dismiss, discovery motions and motions on damages and attorney’s fees.)	5

The following are summaries of the Decisions issued by the Commission in FY 2015:

**Hortencia Zabala v. Providence School Department, Wobberson Torchon, Dr. Tomas Ramirez, Nkoli Onye and Richard Kerbel, Acting Finance Director** (October 1, 2014)

The Complainant alleged that the Respondents discriminated against her with respect to terms and conditions of employment because of her ancestral origin (Hispanic).

At the time of the events in question, the Complainant had been a teacher for the Respondent School Department for nine to ten consecutive years. She alleged that when she was transferred to Alvarez High School, where Respondent Wobberson Torchon was the Principal, he took steps to have her terminated because of her ancestral origin/accent. She further alleged that she was discriminatorily denied a paid sabbatical.

The Commission found that the Complainant proved that Respondent Torchon and the Respondent School Department treated her in a discriminatory way at least in part because of her ancestral origin. (It is unlawful ancestral origin discrimination to take action against employees because of their accent, unless the accent interferes with work performance.) While the Complainant's accent is thick, she took affirmative steps to ensure student understanding of her teaching and a number of witnesses said that she was a good teacher. The Commission found credible evidence that Respondent Torchon was on a campaign to terminate the Complainant based, at least in part, on her accent. He evaluated her, gave her recommendations and then discounted her progress on the recommendations. The timing of the evaluations did not give the Complainant a reasonable time period to implement his recommendations. He utilized the Non-Evaluation Year Intervention process, not to improve her performance as it was designed, but to provide grounds for adverse action against her. Ultimately, the Complainant was assigned to another school.

The Complainant requested a sabbatical and met the requirements of the contract for a partially-paid sabbatical. She was denied because she proposed to take classes relating to English language usage as well as classes relating to mathematics. Respondent Torchon had asked her to improve her English language usage, but the Respondent School Department would not consider the courses to be in her "content area". The Commission took into account that Respondent School Department authorized a sabbatical for a non-Hispanic

teacher to take classes in Spanish, but would not authorize a sabbatical for a Hispanic teacher to take classes to improve her English.

The Commission found that the Complainant did not prove that Respondents Nkoli Onye and Dr. Tomas Ramirez discriminated against her. Respondent Onye evaluated the Complainant because it was part of her job responsibilities, and there was no evidence that her actions were motivated by discrimination. With respect to Respondent Ramirez, the Complainant did not prove that he took adverse actions against her; rather, he simply communicated the decisions made by others.

The Commission ordered that Respondent Torchon undergo training on anti-discrimination laws, that the Respondent School Department post the Commission anti-discrimination poster prominently in its facilities, and that Respondents Torchon and School Department cease and desist unlawful employment practices. The Decision provided for a hearing on relief. The parties asked that the hearing be stayed while the case was on appeal and their request was granted.

**Decision on the Request of the University of Rhode Island for a Bona Fide Occupational Qualification for One Position of Storekeeper**  
(August 29, 2014)

The University of Rhode Island (URI) requested that the Commission certify that the female sex is a bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) for one position of storekeeper at the equipment and locker room at its Athletic Complex. The other positions of storekeeper at the Complex were held by



men. The Commission held a public hearing on the request on July 30, 2014.

The Commission certified a BFOQ for the female sex for one position of storekeeper. The Commission found that URI proved that the BFOQ was justified based on the privacy interests of those who used the facility, which included members of the public, some of whom were children. Women and girls utilized the women's sections of the equipment and locker rooms to dress, undress, shower and use the toilet facilities. The storekeepers were responsible for going into the locker rooms to provide towels and uniforms. The storekeepers also assisted in the fitting of uniforms and putting on some of the uniform components. The storekeeper duties could not be scheduled for particular times since issues with towels or uniforms could arise at any time. The Commission found that URI proved that, given the floor plan of the locker rooms and facilities and the duties of the storekeepers, there was no reasonable alternative that would protect the privacy interests of those who used the facilities other than to have the female sex be a qualification for one of the positions.

The BFOQ is certified for ten years from the date of its issuance in 2014, unless it is amended or revoked by the Commission or a court of competent jurisdiction before that time. During the time the BFOQ is in effect, it is binding on the Commission in any sex discrimination charges alleging discrimination in hiring or transfer with respect to that particular position, unless URI omitted or misstated material facts in its presentation. (It is not binding with

respect to charges alleging sexual harassment or pregnancy discrimination.)

## The Commission at the Courts

The Commission continued to take steps to enforce agency Decisions and Orders and to intervene in court proceedings in which the public interest was implicated. The following are highlights from Fiscal Year 2015:

**State of Rhode Island Dep't of Mental Health, Retardation & Hospitals v. Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, the Estate of Dr. John Satti, Julia Satti Consentino, Administrator**, C.A. No. PC 07-7048 (Superior Court October 17, 2014) (<http://www.courts.ri.gov/Courts/SuperiorCourt/DecisionsOrders/decisions/07-7048.pdf>)

Associate Justice Luis Matos of the Rhode Island Superior Court upheld the Commission's Decision finding that the Respondent, the Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (now named the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals) discriminated against the Complainant, Dr. John Satti, because of his age and in retaliation for prior protected activity (filing previous charges of discrimination).

The Complainant, a physician employed by the Respondent at Eleanor Slater Hospital, had filed two previous charges against the Respondent. With respect to the first charge, the Commission found that the Respondent discriminated against the Complainant because of his age with respect to hire.

In the second case, the Commission found that the Respondent had retaliated against the Complainant because he had filed a previous charge of discrimination.

In the case at issue, the Commission found that the Complainant's supervisor transferred the Complainant to a more difficult job assignment in retaliation for his filing previous charges of discrimination and because of his age. While the Complainant was on sick leave, he was terminated. When a union arbitrator ordered that the Complainant be reinstated to his previous assignment, the Complainant's supervisor acted to have the Complainant's privileges at the Respondent revoked, so that he would not be able to practice at Eleanor Slater Hospital. The supervisor also filed a complaint against the Complainant with the state Medical Board which had the authority to restrict or suspend the Complainant's license to practice medicine in Rhode Island. The Commission found the Respondent's given reasons for these actions to be without credibility and found that the Respondent was motivated by retaliation and the Complainant's age.

In its Decision, the Commission ordered that the Respondent report to the Commission, over the next ten years, data on the age of physicians hired, employed or separated from employment. The Respondent was ordered to provide yearly training to medical supervisory staff on anti-discrimination laws. The Commission required the Respondent to develop an anti-discrimination policy, if it did not already have one, and to distribute its anti-discrimination policy to its employees. In addition, the Commission ordered the Respondent to post

the Commission's anti-discrimination poster in its facilities.

The Complainant did not seek back pay. The Commission awarded over \$19,000.00, plus interest, as compensatory damages to reimburse for the attorney's fees that the Complainant expended up to March 2004 to rectify the adverse actions of the Respondent. The Commission, when it considered the Complainant's motion for attorney's fees for the representation of the Complainant at the Commission, ordered \$73,446 for attorney's fees, \$2812.15 in costs and post-judgment interest on the awarded amount of attorney's fees and costs.

After the Superior Court Decision issued, the Commission ordered the Respondent to pay additional attorney's fees (\$32,504) and costs (\$748.72) for the work of the Complainant's attorneys on appeal.

**Mark Mancini v. City of Providence**, Rhode Island Supreme Court, Case No. SU-14-0088

Plaintiff Mark Mancini brought a case against the City of Providence alleging employment discrimination based on disability. While it was pending in U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island, U.S. District Court Judge William Smith certified a question to the Rhode Island Supreme Court asking whether an employee of a defendant employer can be held liable under the Fair Employment Practices Act, Section 28-5-6(7) of the General Laws of Rhode Island, which provides that it is an unlawful employment practice:

For any person, whether or not an employer, employment agency, labor organization,

or employee, to aid, abet, incite, compel, or coerce the doing of any act declared by this section to be an unlawful employment practice, or to obstruct or prevent any person from complying with the provisions of this chapter or any order issued pursuant to this chapter, or to attempt directly or indirectly to commit any act declared by this section to be an unlawful employment practice.

The case was docketed with the Rhode Island Supreme Court on March 10, 2014. On May 11, 2015, the Commission, the state enforcement agency for the Fair Employment Practices Act, Title 28, Chapter 5 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, filed an amicus brief arguing that the Fair Employment Practices Act authorizes discrimination claims against individual employees. The question was still pending before the Rhode Island Supreme Court at the end of the fiscal year as the Court was awaiting the filing of several briefs.

**RICHR (Grimes) v. Briarwood Meadows et al.**, Rhode Island District Court, CA No. 13-445M

Mr. and Mrs. Grimes were tenants in the Briarwood Meadows Apartment complex in East Greenwich in a large one-bedroom apartment. During the course of their lease term, they had a son. After the birth of the Grimes baby, the landlords advised the Grimes Family that they had a few choices: they could continue to rent the one-bedroom apartment at a premium for only a few months; they could vacate the property; or they could move to a two-bedroom apartment in the complex. Mrs. Grimes subsequently filed a charge against Briarwood's owners and management with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in Boston, which referred the case to the

Commission to investigate.

The Commission sent an anonymous tester to the property who confirmed the two-heads per bedroom policy of the Defendants. During the course of the investigation, the Defendants offered no sound business reason to support their policy. The Defendants initially maintained that housing the baby in a one-bedroom apartment would cause overcrowding, extra wear and tear on the building, an increase in parking and extra use of the pool and facilities; they failed, however, to explain how the presence of a newborn would so affect the property.

After a thorough investigation, the Commission found probable cause to believe that the actions of the Defendants were discriminatory on the basis of familial status. The Defendants did not wish to mediate the case. The Commission then filed a complaint in Kent County Superior Court on behalf of itself, Mardea Caulcrick-Grimes, Ernest Grimes, minor child Grimes (the "Grimes Family"), and Allison Coté, the tester utilized by the Commission, alleging violations of Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, as amended by the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, § 42 U.S.C. 3601, *et seq.*, and the state Fair Housing Practices Act, Rhode Island General Laws, § 34-37-1 *et seq.* Ms. Coté is also a Senior Compliance Officer at the Commission. The Defendants subsequently removed the case to the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island.

The complaint contained three allegations of discrimination by the Defendants: (1) changing the terms, conditions and privileges of the Grimes Family lease with the Defendants; (2) mak-

ing, printing and publishing notices [termination of tenancy letters] with respect to the Grimes Family's rental of a dwelling, which notices indicated limitations and discrimination based on familial status; and (3) making unavailable or denying a dwelling to the Grimes Family and Allison Coté because of familial status.

The Plaintiff moved for partial summary judgment on the issue of liability under allegation (3), *supra*, while the Defendants moved for summary judgment on the complaint in its entirety. The Plaintiff's motion was granted while the Defendants' motion was denied. The Court found that the two-heads per apartment policy had a substantial disparate impact on families with children, citing the report of the Commission's expert, Mr. Calvin Bradford.

The issues remaining to be decided are damages arising out of the Defendants' conduct which was the basis for the granting of the motion for summary judgment (3), *supra*, and liability and damages under allegations (1) and (2), *supra*. In the decision granting Plaintiff's motion for summary judgment, Judge John J. McConnell, Jr. listed the damages to which the prevailing Plaintiffs are arguably entitled. The damages are as follows: compensatory damages for the Grimes Family, including emotional distress, moving expenses, etc.; compensatory damages for the tester, Allison Coté; counsel fees to the Commission; civil penalty from each of the six Defendants; damages arising out of the frustration of the Commission's mission; compensatory damages for diversion of Commission's resources resulting from its efforts to investigate and counteract familial status discrimi-

nation by the Defendants; out-of-pocket damages for the Commission's expert and deposition costs.

A settlement conference is scheduled for February 2016, with a trial shortly thereafter if settlement is not reached.

**RICHR (Oliveira) v. Furniture Mattress Warehouse, et al.**, Superior Court (PC No. 2012-6640) and U.S. Bankruptcy Court (D.RI) (AP No 01:15-ap-01013)

In December 2011, the Commission issued a Decision and Order finding that Luisa Oliveira was discriminated against on the basis of her sex and subjected to sexual harassment by her former employer, Furniture Mattress Warehouse, Inc., as well as by several named managers and co-workers. The Commission ordered, among other things, the payment of lost wages, compensation for medical expenses, and compensatory damages for pain and suffering.

In December 2012, the Commission filed a Petition to Enforce its Decision in Superior Court. The Petition was granted and judgment was entered for Ms. Oliveira against all of the Defendants. Shortly thereafter, one of the Defendants filed a Joint Petition for Bankruptcy with his wife. The Commission then filed an Adversary Complaint while the bankruptcy petition was pending, contesting the dischargeability of the debt incurred as a result of the Superior Court judgment. The Defendants were served and failed to respond. As a result, the Commission had a Default Judgment entered, upholding the claim in the Complaint that the Superior Court judgment was non-dischargeable.

## Legislative Update

The Commission annually monitors all bills before the General Assembly and identifies those which either affect the agency directly or have an impact in the area of civil rights. During the 2015 legislative session, Commission staff members presented oral and/or written testimony on numerous bills.

Among the bills which the Commission supported were bills seeking to:

\*amend the state Fair Housing Practices Act (FHPA) to prohibit discrimination on the basis of "military status", as a veteran with an honorable discharge or an honorable or general administrative discharge, or a service member in the Armed Forces  
(*PASSED; NOW LAW*)

\*amend the state Fair Employment Practices Act (FEPA) to prohibit employers from taking adverse action against employees who are late to work due to responding to an emergency as a fire or ambulance department volunteer  
(*PASSED; NOW LAW*)

\*amend the FEPA to require expanded employer accommodation of pregnancy, pregnancy-related conditions and nursing  
(*PASSED; NOW LAW*)

\*establish a "Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act" which would, among other things:  
—prohibit consent searches of pedestrians absent reasonable suspicion or

probable cause of criminal activity (RS/PC)

—require law enforcement officers to document the RS/PC basis for searches of vehicles, motorists or pedestrians

—require law enforcement officers to advise stopped motorists of the reason for the stop

—prohibit consent searches of juveniles absent RS/PC

—mandate an additional four years of collection of traffic stops data by law enforcement to assess racial disparities in stops and searches  
(*PASSED; NOW LAW*)

\*expand eligibility to apply for expungement of a criminal record

\*require that all student suspensions are to be served in school unless the student presents a danger, and require each superintendent to conduct a study to assess racial/ethnic/disability disparities in student discipline

\*increase health insurance coverage for hearing aids

\*expand the equal pay provisions under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor and Training

\*establish an on-line process for voter registration and establish a process for in-person early voting

## Fair Housing Overview

### HOUSING CASELOAD

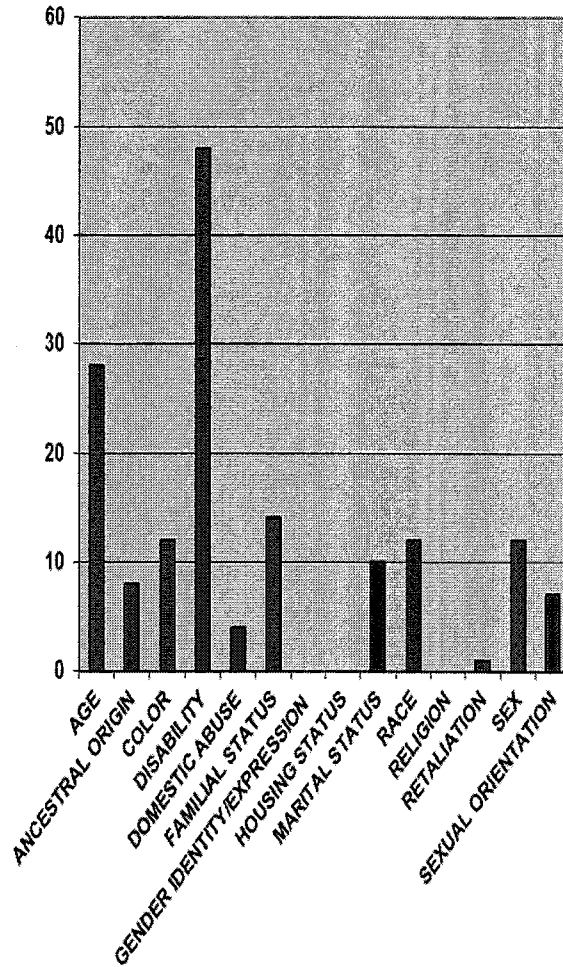
The population of Rhode Island in 2010 was 1,069,725. Under guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a state having a population of up to 1,500,000 residents should, on average, receive and process up to 15 fair housing charges per year. **The Commission received 101 charges and processed 94 charges in FY 2015, which is equivalent to HUD's estimated average workload of a state having a population of over 10,000,000 residents.**

### INTAKE AND DISPOSITIONS FIVE-YEAR VIEW

FY	INTAKE	PROCESSED
2015*	101	94
2014	49	51
2013	51	50
2012	40	48
2011	53	54

\*The substantial increase in charges for FY 2015 was primarily attributable to the intake of nearly four dozen Commission-initiated charges pursuant to a testing project; see page 20 for details.

### FY 15 HOUSING INTAKE BY BASIS



(see p. 7 for full statistics)

### CHARGE DISPOSITIONS

The Commission processed 94 housing complaints in FY 2015. Seventeen cases (18.1%) resulted in a finding of Probable Cause, while 24 cases (25.5%) resulted in a No Probable Cause finding. Two cases (2.1%) resulted in a split ruling. A settlement was achieved in 38 additional cases (40.4%), including two post-Probable Cause cases. Twelve cases (12.8%) were withdrawn by the complainant. One case (1.1%) was closed based on lack of jurisdiction.

**Settlements:** From the time a charge is filed and the investigation commences, the Commission seeks to amicably resolve all pending matters. **Thirty-six cases were successfully settled during the investigative phase.** Resolutions of these cases included respondents' agreement to: grant apartments; provide monetary settlements; rescind rental increases; return security deposits; make repairs; place complainants on waiting lists; revise pet policies to accommodate assistive animals; remove unlawful inquiries from applications; grant reasonable accommodations for tenants with disabilities (including allowing live-in aides, permitting service/assistive animals, and approving a transfer to a ground-floor unit); pay civil penalties; and attend fair housing training seminars.

**Post-Probable Cause Resolutions:**

The Commission successfully settled the following two cases after a finding of probable cause:

**Doe v. City of Central Falls**

In June 2013, a couple filed a charge individually and on behalf of their minor child against the City of Central Falls. The charge alleged that the City failed to make a reasonable accommodation for a disability and engaged in retaliation. Specifically, the charge alleged that the couple's minor child has a disability, some of the symptoms of which are alleviated by the presence and companionship of a pit bull service dog. After the family moved to a rental unit in Central Falls, the couple attempted to license the dog with the City. Despite the couple having medical documentation attesting to the

child's need for the service animal, the attempts were denied, with the City maintaining that an "Aggressive Dog" Ordinance prohibited new City residents from having pit bulls. Following the couple's attempts to obtain the license for the dog, the City scheduled the forced removal of the dog from the Complainants' residence. Shortly after the couple and their attorney met with the Mayor to discuss the issue of an accommodation, the City's Animal Control Officer went to the home and removed the service animal.

Subsequent to a finding of probable cause, the matter was settled, with respondent City agreeing to: 1) pay the Complainants' attorney fees (\$8000.00); 2) have its Animal Control Officer and police officers with a rank higher than Lieutenant undergo fair housing training in respect to reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities requiring assistive animals (conducted by RICHR); and 3) pay \$1,000.00 for the purchase of fair housing educational materials. (Prior to the execution of the settlement agreement, the service animal had been returned to the Complainants' home and the ordinance at issue had been repealed.)

**Doe v. Providence Building, Sanitary and Educational Association, Winn Mgmt. Co., LLC and Lori Lemoi, alias**

In January 2014, a couple filed a charge individually and on behalf of their minor children against the owner, management company and property manager of their apartment complex. The charge alleged discrimination on the bases of race, color, national origin, religion and disability. The Complain-

ants maintained that they were subjected to harassment, hostility and threats by residents, that management failed to act upon their complaints of mistreatment/discrimination, that management obtained a restraining order against the husband which resulted in him having to vacate the premises and become homeless, and that Respondents failed to allow the reasonable accommodation of permitting the husband to return to the complex so that his wife could care for his disabilities. Complainants further alleged that Respondents issued them an eviction notice based on the false complaints of other residents.

Subsequent to a finding of probable cause on the Complainants' claim of disability discrimination, the case settled, with Respondents agreeing to: 1) engage in a good-faith interactive process with Complainants and their medical providers to enable the medical providers to assess whether any reasonable accommodation(s) could mitigate Respondents' concerns; 2) implement the reasonable accommodation(s) identified by the medical providers, if applicable; 3) vacate the eviction order.

#### **COMMISSION PREVAILS IN FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT FAMILIAL STATUS DISCRIMINATION CASE**

The Commission was successful in obtaining summary judgment in a case of alleged familial status discrimination. For particulars, see ***RICHR (Grimes) v. Briarwood Meadows et al.***, p. 15.

#### **COMMISSION IMPLEMENTS HUD PARTNERSHIP GRANT FOR FAIR HOUSING TESTING**

In November of 2013, the Commission's application for a HUD Partnership grant to test housing providers' compliance with federal and state laws pertaining to reasonable accommodations for assistive animals was approved. Pursuant to the grant, Commission Legal Counsel and Fair Housing Unit Supervisor Francis Gaschen recruited and trained a fair housing tester. A total of 59 tests were conducted throughout the state during the summer of 2014. The 59 tests resulted in the filing of 20 Commission-initiated charges on the basis of the housing providers' failure to consider a reasonable accommodation to their pet policies in respect to persons with assistive animals. During the course of the 59 tests, violations of other state and federal housing laws also were discovered, leading to the filing of an additional 26 Commission-initiated charges. The latter group of charges resulted from some housing providers asking unlawful questions on their application documents.

As of the publishing of this Report, 44 of the cases had closed. A settlement was reached in 38 cases, with each housing provider amending their forms and policies to comply with state and federal laws. The Commission also held three one-hour training seminars on the areas of reasonable accommodations and the differences between state and federal anti-discrimination housing laws. Continuing education credit was available for attorneys and realtors who took advantage of the free seminars. (Settlements were pending in the two remaining open cases.)



## Outreach

DATE	TOPIC	LOCATION/GROUP
7/8/14	General/Employment Discrimination	East Providence Affirmative Action Committee, East Providence
7/10/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	AIDS Project RI, Providence
7/27/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County, Peace Dale
7/28/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	Riverside Church, East Providence
8/3/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	Providence Presbyterian Church, Providence
8/13/14	Fair Housing	RI Minority Elderly Task Force, Spring Villa Apts., North Providence
8/18/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	TGI Network, Cranston
8/20/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	Housing Network of RI, Pawtucket
8/20/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	Cumberland Public Library, Cumberland
8/21/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	RI Coalition for the Homeless, Pawtucket
8/27/14	General Overview, LGBT Fair Housing Rights	Youth Pride RI, Inc., Providence
9/10/14	General Overview	Information Table, Community Service Opportunities Fair, Brown University, Providence
9/18/14	Fair Housing	Foster Grandparent Program, Providence
10/28/14	General Overview/Sexual Harassment	"Social Work & the Law" class, Rhode Island College, Providence
10/29/14	Fair Housing	RI Minority Elderly Task Force, Spring Villa Apts., North Providence
10/30/14	Commission Overview	"Exploring Your Options: Public Sector" event at Roger Williams University Law School, Bristol
11/6/14	General Overview/Employment Discrimination	YearUp, Providence
11/6/14	Overview/Investigative Process/Annual Highlights	EEOC/FEPA Regional Conference, Portland, ME
11/24/14	General Overview, Domestic Violence Victim Fair Housing Rights	Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties, Warren
11/25/14	General Overview, Domestic Violence Victim Fair Housing Rights	Domestic Violence Resource Center of South County, Wakefield
12/9/14	General Overview, Domestic Violence Victim Fair Housing Rights	Women's Center of RI, Providence
12/11/14	General Overview, Domestic Violence Victim Fair Housing Rights	Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center, Pawtucket
12/17/14	Fair Housing	RI Minority Elderly Task Force, Riverside

## Outreach

12/17/14	General Overview, Domestic Violence Victim Fair Housing Rights	Sojourner House, Providence
1/15/15	Fair Housing	RI Real Estate Investors Group, Warwick
1/17/15	Fair Housing	Article in <i>Providence Journal</i> highlighting outreach of 1/15/15
1/22/15	Racial Profiling legislation	RI State Council of Churches Board Meeting, Pawtucket
2/5/15	Commission Process, Pregnancy Discrimination	Representatives from Women's Fund RI, at the Commission office
3/20/15	General Overview, Employment Discrimination	Roger Williams University School of Law, class on Employment Law, at the Commission office
3/25/15	General/Employment Discrimination	East Providence Affirmative Action Committee, East Providence
3/30/15	General Overview	Meeting with reporter for Associated Press, at the Commission office
4/1/15	FY14 Overview/Disability Discrimination	Associated Press article
4/22/15	General/Employment Discrimination	East Providence Affirmative Action Committee, East Providence
4/25/15	General Overview	Information Table, YMCA of Greater Providence Healthy Kids Day Fair, Roger Williams Park, Providence
4/28/15	Developments in Employment Discrimination Law	RI Bar Association, Labor Law Committee, Providence
4/30/15	Fair Housing – Reasonable Accommodation/Assistive Animals and Age Discrimination	Commission Hearing Room, Providence
4/30/15	Fair Housing – Reasonable Accommodation/Assistive Animals and Age Discrimination	Commission Hearing Room, Providence
5/6/15	General Overview	Parent Meeting, Alfred Lima Sr. Elementary School, Providence
5/12/15	General Overview, Ancestral Origin Discrimination	North Providence Fire Dept., North Providence
5/13/15	General Overview, Ancestral Origin Discrimination	North Providence Fire Dept., North Providence
5/15/15	General Overview, Ancestral Origin Discrimination	North Providence Fire Dept., North Providence
5/18/15	General Overview, Ancestral Origin Discrimination	North Providence Fire Dept., North Providence
5/27/15	General/Employment Discrimination	East Providence Affirmative Action Committee, East Providence
6/26/15	Fair Housing	Newport Housing Hotline, Newport
6/30/15	Fair Housing – Reasonable Accommodation/Assistive Animals and Age Discrimination	Commission Hearing Room, Providence

## Federal Agreements

### U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

The Commission has been certified by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as a Fair Employment Practices Agency since 1968. Consistent with Section 706 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Commission is authorized to process charges of employment discrimination which fall under federal as well as state jurisdiction (co-filed). Each year, the Commission enters into a work-sharing agreement with EEOC under which the Commission is expected to investigate a predetermined number of cases. EEOC reimburses the Commission at a fixed rate for each case closed in compliance with the guidelines spelled out in the agreement. **This year, the Commission met its contractual obligation by closing 210 co-filed cases.**

### U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Commission continued its relationship with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as defined under the federal Fair Housing Act, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The Commission enters into an annual contract with HUD for fixed-rate reimbursement for the processing of housing cases filed under both state and federal law. **The Commission took in 101 charges of alleged housing discrimination, 67 of which were co-filed with HUD, and processed 94 charges, 65 of which were co-filed with HUD.**

## FEDERAL FUNDING, FY 2015

EEOC*	Case Processing	\$147,000
	Training/ Transportation	\$1,500
HUD*	Case Processing	\$175,200
	Administrative Costs	\$27,500
	Training/ Transportation	\$31,625
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$382,825</b>

\*EEOC's fiscal contract year was October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. HUD's contract year was July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.

## Equal Opportunity Commitment

The Commission's commitment to equal opportunity remains constant. In addition to promoting its internal affirmative action plan, the Commission routinely engages in endeavors geared to enrich and diversify the Rhode Island community. Staff members are available to participate in seminars and conferences that address equal opportunity as it relates to the Commission's work.

### COMMISSION WORKFORCE PROFILE

	Employees	Percent
<b>Total Staff</b>	14	100
<b>Women</b>	9	64.3
<b>Racial/Ethnic Minorities</b>	7	50

## Interns

Each year, high school, college, graduate students and recent graduates receive first-hand experience in the Commission's primary functions through the intern program. Interns assist in investigations, conduct legal research, perform clerical duties and work independently through a structured program. For their work, interns may earn college/graduate school credits, stipends through work-study grants, and/or receive compensation from the state Government Internship Program.

### SPRING 2015 (continued)

Megan Gallagher	Tolman High School
Karen Normil	Brown University
Jessica Parenteau	Rhode Island College
Sandra Seals	Roger Williams Univ. (Paralegal Program)
Angelina Stabile	Roger Williams Univ.
Channa Uy	Community College of Rhode Island
Kathryn Velazquez	Central Falls H.S.

### FALL 2014

Kimberly Charles	Brown University
Jason Charpentier	Rhode Island College
Alben Chingo	Tolman High School
Jessica Ethier	Rhode Island College
Colleen Giles	Roger Williams Univ.
Alex Lopez	Tolman High School
John Pannozzi	Rhode Island College
Jessica Parenteau	Rhode Island College
Caitlyn Stein	Roger Williams Univ.
Channa Uy	Community College of Rhode Island
Jenna Waldman	Brown University

### SUMMER 2015

Emmie Brennan	Roger Williams Univ.
Mairead Carr	St. John's University
Caroline Cipollini	Smith College
Ariana Delfino	University of RI
Pamela Espinal	Russell Sage College
Kristen Fontaine	Stonehill College
Ana Jerolamon	University of RI
Trevor Lang	Dickinson College
Brian Lutz	Roger Williams Univ. School of Law
Aubrey Sneesby	Univ. of Maryland
Nathan Walsh	Vanderbilt University Law School

### SPRING 2015

Deanna Bianco	Johnson & Wales Univ.
Jason Charpentier	Rhode Island College
Alben Chingo	Tolman High School
Ariana Delfino	University of RI
Marisa Ebli	Bryant University
Jessica Ethier	Rhode Island College

## Recognitions



Commissioner Iraida Diaz Williams worked with members of the General Assembly on legislation to increase health insurance coverage for hearing aids. She was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from Cochlear America for her advocacy on behalf of individuals who use cochlear implants.



Commissioner Camille Vella-Wilkinson worked with the Warwick Community Chapter of the AARP, a chapter she helped institute, on issues affecting senior citizens such as substance abuse, home safety issues and housing accommodations. She testified before General Assembly Committees in support of various pieces of legislation, including the Voting and Electronic Modernization Act. She also drafted legislation to allow senior citizens (65+) to audit one class for free and attend an additional class for credit at half price at all state schools. She continued her work in support of Rhode Island veterans by, among other endeavors: working with a local veterans group, Wreaths Across America, to distribute holiday wreaths in Exeter; advocating for the ability of disabled veterans to use medical marijuana in public housing; serving as a featured speaker at the Disabled American Veterans' (DAV) national conference, held in Rhode Island; working with the DAV in the effort to broaden veterans' benefits. For her exemplary work on behalf of veterans, she was presented with the Commander's Award for exemplary outreach and services to the veteran community by

Chapter 9 of the DAV. Commissioner Vella-Wilkinson was selected by Governor Raimondo to serve on the Search Committee for a new Adjutant General of the RI National Guard.



Commissioner Alberto Aponte Cardona was nominated by Governor Raimondo to serve on the State Labor Relations Board; the nomination was confirmed by the Senate and he currently serves on the Board. He also accepted the position of President of the Rhode Island Hispanic Bar Association.



After completing her work at the Commission as a Community Liaison Specialist overseeing the implementation of a partnership grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development aimed at educating victims of domestic violence and members of the LGBT community on fair housing rights, Susan Chase Pracht (former Commission Investigator, 2006-2011), accepted a position as an EEO Investigator for Cook County, Illinois.

Connect  
with the  
Commission



The Commission has joined the Facebook community, with its own page as a governmental organization named “Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights”. Explanation of work the Commission is doing, as well as information pertaining to public outreach sessions is posted. Become our friend and be in the know!



For general information on the Commission, as well as access to intake questionnaires, Rules and Regulations and Decisions and Orders, visit our website:

<http://www.richr.ri.gov>